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Women Workers Today

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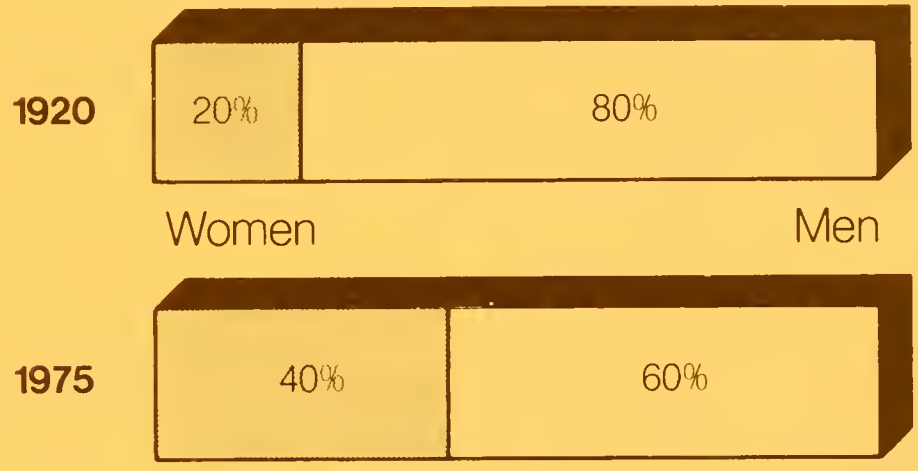
WOMEN WORKERS TODAY

The nearly 37 million women in the civilian labor force are a cross section of all women in the Nation. They are of all ages from 16 to 70 or more and of every race and color. They include the married, the never married, the widowed, and the divorced or separated; and they live on farms, in suburbs, and in central cities.

During the last 55 years the ranks of women workers have risen from only 1 out of 5 to 2 out of 5 of all workers:



Over this period the profile of the average woman worker has changed greatly--from that of the 28-year-old single factory worker or clerk of 1920 to that of the 35-year-old woman of today who may be found in any of a great number of occupations.

Women accounted for nearly three-fifths of the increase in the civilian labor force in the last decade. They have supplied many of the workers needed for expanding industries--particularly the service-producing industries where their contribution is necessary to the continued functioning of such vital areas as health and education. Women also continue to provide an important labor resource for the goods-producing industries, and are making inroads into occupations of a more nontraditional nature. Who are these

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Note.--Data in this report refer to persons 16 years of age and over in the civilian labor force, unless otherwise indicated. Figures are from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, and U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

women workers? What jobs do they hold? What are their work patterns? How much do they earn? The statistical profile which follows provides some of the answers to these questions.

Personal Characteristics

The likelihood that a woman will be in the labor force at any particular time varies considerably according to her age, marital and family status, education, race or ethnic background, and, if married, her husband's income. However, 9 out of 10 girls will work at some time in their lives.

Age

In 1975, 46 percent of all women 16 years of age and over were in the labor force, considerably higher than the 34-percent rate which prevailed 25 years earlier. Although women are most likely to be working if they are young, have no children, and have completed their schooling (18 to 24 years old), their rate of participation is also relatively high and consistent (about 55 percent) in the so-called prime working years of 25 to 54. In fact, the greatest gains in labor force rates since 1950 have been registered among women 20 to 54 years of age. Women are least likely to be in the labor force if they are under 18 or over 54 years of age.

Women Workers in 1950 and 1975

(Numbers in thousands)

Age	1975		1950	
	Number	Percent of population	Number	Percent of population
16 years and over	36,998	46.3	18,389	33.9
16 and 17 years	1,652	40.2	611	30.1
18 to 64 years	34,313	54.3	17,195	37.2
18 and 19 years	2,387	58.1	1,101	51.3
20 to 24 years	6,069	64.1	2,675	46.0
25 to 34 years	8,456	54.6	4,092	34.0
35 to 44 years	6,492	55.8	4,161	39.1
45 to 54 years	6,666	54.6	3,327	37.9
55 to 64 years	4,244	41.0	1,839	27.0
65 years and over	1,033	8.3	584	9.7

Marital Status

Almost three-fifths (58 percent) of all women workers are married and living with their husbands; more than one-fifth (23 percent) have never been married; and nearly one-fifth (19 percent) are widowed, divorced, or separated from their husbands. Forty-four percent of all married women are in the labor force--considerably more than widows (24 percent), a great many of whom are elderly. But married women are less likely to be labor

force participants than divorced or separated women (65 percent) or never married women (57 percent). These labor force participation rates are substantially greater than those which prevailed in 1950.

Marital Status of Women Workers in 1950 and 1975

(Numbers in thousands)

Marital status	1975		1950 1/	
	Number	Percent of population	Number	Percent of population
Never married	8,464	56.7	5,621	50.5
Married (husband present)	21,111	44.4	8,550	23.8
Divorced or separated	4,479	64.8	723	2/47.4
Widowed	2,453	24.3	2,901	3/36.0

1/ Data are for women 14 years of age and over.
2/ Separated only.
3/ Widowed or divorced.

Children

The number of working mothers (women with children under 18 years of age) has increased more than threefold since 1950. There were about 14.1 million mothers in the labor force in March 1975, an increase of 4.5 million in the last decade. About 5.4 million of these working mothers had children under the age of 6. Of the 27.6 million children of working mothers, 21.1 million were 6 to 17 years of age and 6.5 million were under the age of 6. Among the children of working mothers, 5.0 million had mothers who were heads of families; 1.1 million of these children were under the age of 6.

The 47.4-percent labor force participation rate of mothers in March 1975 was slightly higher than the rate for all women (46 percent). In 1950 the rate for mothers was two-thirds as high as for all women. Although studies confirm the fact that the presence of young children in the family has an important effect on the mother's labor force participation decisions--with the lowest rates registered by those mothers with children under 6--the rates for mothers with children of any age have increased markedly since 1950.

Labor Force Participation Rates of Mothers,
Selected Years, 1950-1975

Year	Mothers with children		
	Under 18 years	6 to 17 years	Under 6 years 1/
1950	21.6	32.8	13.6
1955	27.0	38.4	18.2
1965	35.0	45.7	25.3
1975	47.4	54.8	38.9

1/ May also have older children.

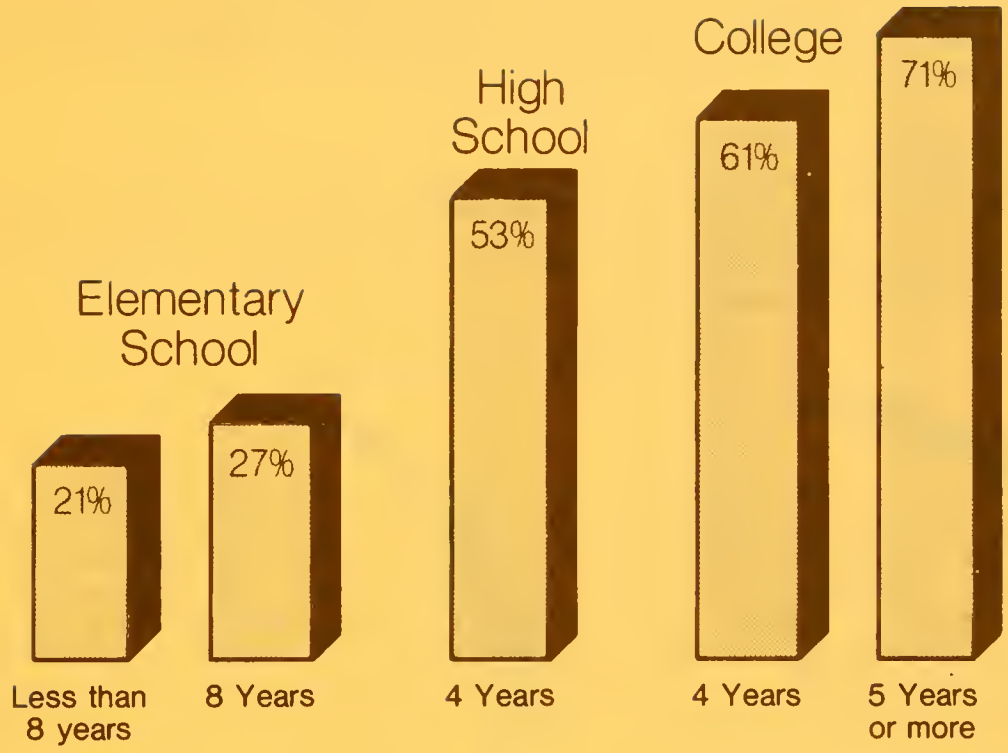
Note: For 1950 and 1955, data are for April; for 1965 and 1975, data are for March.

Among married women living with their husbands, nearly two-fifths of those with children under 6 years but more than half of those with school-age children only are workers. Among widows, divorcees, and women separated from their husbands, however, more than half (55 percent) of those with preschool children are workers. But if they have school-age children only, about 2 out of 3 of these women are in the labor force.

Education

The average woman in the labor force has completed a median of 12.5 years of schooling--the same number of years as her male counterpart. About 7 out of 10 women workers have at least a high school education. Of all women in the labor force, more than 1 out of 4 has completed 1 or more years of college and 1 out of 8 is a college graduate. A much higher proportion of women workers 20 to 34 years of age are high school graduates (85 percent) than are women workers 35 years and over (68 percent).

Generally the more education a woman has, the more likely she is to be in the labor force. Of all women 16 years of age and over who had completed less than 8 years of schooling, about 1 out of 5 was in the labor force in March 1975. However, about half of those who had completed high school and about 7 out of 10 of those who had 5 years or more of college were workers, as shown in the following chart.



About 29 million girls and women 3 to 34 years of age were attending school in the fall of 1974. The 3.9 million women (under age 35) enrolled in college were about 44 percent of all college students under 35. The number of black women in college in October 1974 (392,000) was more than 3 times the number in October 1964.

Minority Races 1/

About one-eighth of all women workers are of minority races (about 4.8 million women). Their labor force participation rates are generally higher than those of white women. Forty-nine percent of all minority women but only 46 percent of white women were in the labor force in 1975. Among women of the usual working ages (18 to 64), the respective proportions were 56 and 54 percent. Minority women constitute almost 46 percent of all minority workers.

1/ Data for minority races refer to all races other than white. Negroes constituted 89 percent of all persons other than white in the United States in 1970; Orientals, 8 percent; and American Indians, 3 percent. Spanish-origin persons are generally included in the white population--about 93 percent of the Spanish-origin population is white.

Black.--Eleven percent of all women workers in 1975 were black. Forty-nine percent of black women were workers. The highest labor force participation rate was among those 25 to 34 years of age (63 percent).

Spanish origin.--About 4 percent of all women workers in 1975 were of Spanish origin. Forty-two percent of Spanish-origin women were in the labor force. The highest labor force participation rate was among those 20 to 24 years of age (55 percent).

Husband's Income

A married woman is most apt to be working if her husband's income is between $7,000 and $9,999; 50 percent of such women work. She is least apt to be working if her husband's income is below $5,000 or is $10,000 or over (35 and 45 percent, respectively).

Employment Characteristics

Worklife Patterns

Typically a woman enters the labor force after she has finished her schooling and works a few years before she marries and has her first child. A very small proportion of women leave the labor force permanently at this time. For those married women who continue to work, most will experience some breaks in employment during their childbearing and childrearing years. However, an increasing proportion of young married women with and without children are remaining in the labor force. More than 4 out of 10 married women 25 to 34 years of age were workers in March 1975, as compared with 3 out of 10 in 1965 and more than 2 out of 10 in 1950.

Of the 43 million women who were not in the labor force in 1975, nearly 35 million were keeping house, nearly 4 million were students, and about 4 million were out of the labor force because of ill health, disability, or other reasons.

Full-Time and Full-Year Workers 2/

Almost 7 out of 10 women workers have full-time jobs at some time during the year, but just over 4 out of 10 work at full-time jobs the year round. Women 16 to 19 years of age, most of whom are in school, are least likely to be employed full time the year round--only 9 percent of those who worked at any time in 1974 were so employed. Women 55 to 59 years of age are most likely to be fully employed the year round (57 percent in 1974).

Part-Time Workers

Part-time employment frequently is preferred by married women with family responsibilities (especially women with young children), students, and women

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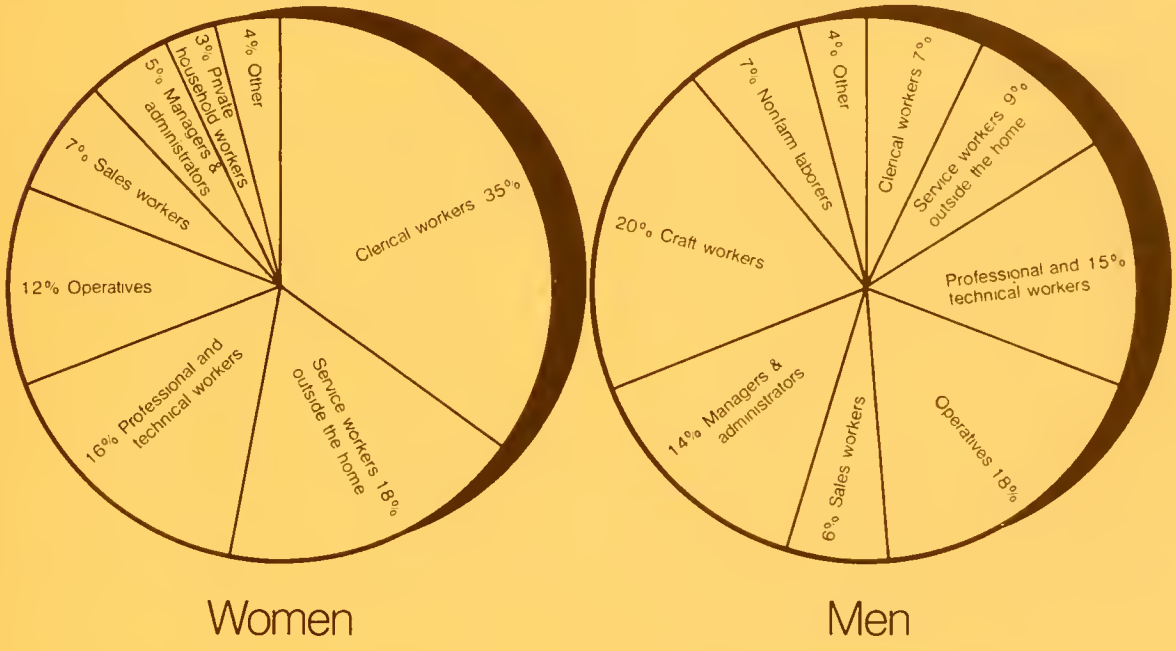
2/ Persons who work 35 hours or more a week, 50 to 52 weeks a year.

65 years of age and over. However, some women work part time involuntarily because they are unable to find full-time jobs. Thus, 13.9 million women (or 33 percent of all women workers) had part-time jobs at some time during 1974. Part-time work is most common among farm, private household, and sales workers. But many women also hold part-time jobs as waitresses or cooks; bookkeepers; stenographers, typists, or secretaries; teachers; and medical or other health workers.

Occupations

The occupational distribution of women is very different from that of men. This is shown in the following charts for employed persons in 1975.



Women are more apt than men to be white-collar workers, but the jobs they hold are usually less skilled and pay less than those of men. Women are two-fifths of all professional and technical workers, but these women are most likely to be teachers (2.1 million women) and health workers (1.4 million). In fact, women account for 72 percent of teachers (except college) and 64 percent of all health workers. Women are less likely than men to be managers and administrators, and represent only about one-fifth of these workers. They are, however, 78 percent of all clerical workers (including more than 4 million women secretaries, stenographers, and typists).

About 1 out of 7 women workers is employed in a blue-collar job, but almost half the men are in such jobs. Women are almost as likely as men to be operatives, but are very seldom employed as skilled craft workers--the occupation group for 1 out of 5 men workers. Only 5 percent of all craft workers are women.

More than 1 out of 5 employed women but only 1 out of 11 men is a service worker. Eight out of 10 women and virtually all of the men service workers are employed in occupations other than private household work.

Minority women are less likely than white women to hold white-collar jobs (44 percent compared with 63 percent), and are more likely to be in service work (37 percent compared with 20 percent) or blue-collar work (18 and 14 percent, respectively). The proportion of minority women employed in clerical work has continued to increase, reaching 25 percent in 1975. At the same time, the proportion in private household work has continued to decline, dropping to 11 percent. A decade ago these figures were 12 and 30 percent, respectively.

Unemployment

Unemployed women numbered 3.4 million and accounted for 44 percent of all unemployed persons in 1975. Unemployment rates are consistently higher for women than for men, for teenagers than for adults, and for minorities than for whites, as shown below:

Race and age	Unemployment rate in 1975	
	Women	Men
All races	9.3	7.9
16 to 19 years	19.7	20.1
20 years and over	8.0	6.7
White	8.6	7.2
16 to 19 years	17.4	18.3
20 years and over	7.5	6.2
Minority races	14.0	13.7
16 to 19 years	38.5	35.4
20 years and over	11.5	11.7

In March 1975 nearly half a million unemployed women were family heads. Their rate of unemployment was 10.0 percent, compared with 6.0 percent for men family heads in husband-wife families.

Earnings

Among full-time workers employed throughout 1974, women's median earnings were less than three-fifths of those of men--$6,772 and $11,835, respectively. There are many reasons for this earnings gap. For example,

men on the average have had more years of worklife experience than women. And even on full-time schedules, women work fewer overtime hours a week than men. Furthermore, the concentration of women in certain low-wage occupations and industries is a primary factor in their lower average earnings level. Nevertheless, various research studies have found that a differential between the earnings of women and men remains after adjusting for such factors as education, work experience, and occupation or industry group.

Median wage or salary incomes of year-round full-time women workers 14 years of age and over in selected major occupation groups in 1974 (latest data available) were as follows:

Major occupation group	Income	As percent of men's income
Professional and technical workers	$9,587	66
Nonfarm managers and administrators	9,195	59
Clerical workers	6,868	60
Sales workers	5,114	41
Operatives (including transport)	5,848	58
Service workers (except private household)	5,206	60

The median wage or salary income of year-round full-time women workers of minority races was only $6,611 in 1974--about 94 percent of that of white women, 73 percent of that of minority men, and 54 percent of that of white men. In 1964, the median income of minority women was 69 percent of that of white women.

Working Wives' Contributions to Family Income

The money contributions of working wives are of crucial importance where they raise family income above the low-income level or from a low to a middle level.3/ Only 4 percent of all husband-wife families had incomes below $5,000 in 1974 when the wife was a worker; 13 percent, when she was not.

Among all wives who worked during 1974, the median contribution was more than one-fourth of the total family income; among those who worked year round full time, it was nearly two-fifths. About 2.5 million wives, or 12 percent of all wives who worked, contributed half or more of the family income.

3/ The low-income or poverty level is based on the Bureau of the Census definition of poverty, adjusted annually in accordance with changes in the Department of Labor's Consumer Price Index. Classified as poor in 1974 were those nonfarm households where total money income was less than $2,495 for an unrelated individual, $3,211 for a couple, and $5,038 for a family of four.

Family Heads

Among all families, about 1 out of 8 was headed by a woman in March 1975. Of the 7.2 million female family heads, 3.9 million, or 54 percent, were in the labor force. Nearly two-thirds of these women workers were the only earners in their families. About 1 out of 10 women workers was head of the family. Nearly one-third (32 percent) had incomes below the low-income level in 1974. Among the 2 million minority women workers who headed families, 35 percent had incomes below the low-income level.

Among all families with income below the poverty level in 1974, 46 percent were headed by women; about 65 percent of such minority families were headed by women. Among all minority families, almost 1 out 3 was headed by a woman.

Outlook

An increase in employment opportunities for women depends largely upon a continued improvement in general economic conditions. During 1974 and early 1975 the unemployment rates of women, as well as those of men, rose steadily, reaching post-World War II highs as many businesses were forced to restrict hirings and resort to layoffs to counter the economic slowdown.

As the economy recovers and the upward trend in employment continues, the outlook for women workers should be favorable. Women should enjoy opportunities in selected professional and technical, managerial, clerical, skilled craft, and service occupations. In addition, legislation prohibiting sex discrimination in employment will continue to open up new opportunities for women to train for and enter into more diversified jobs and to advance to jobs of higher skill level. Women who are informed about opportunities before making career selections will be able to capitalize on these opportunities in fields where skilled workers will be in demand.

In addition to new job opportunities in expanding occupations, advances in the educational attainment of women in particular fields, greater longevity of women, and the trend toward smaller families all point to continuing increases in the labor force participation of women.

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